

MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

OCTOBER, 1971
VOL. 29, NO.5

THE LANDLORD MURDER CASE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Beautiful they were, made for a good man's love, yet evil was with them always, the two girls who held one deadly key to a murdered man's gold. Could Mike Shayne find an answer to the riddle of a house which sold death—and a man who had died twice in one night?

.....2 to 41

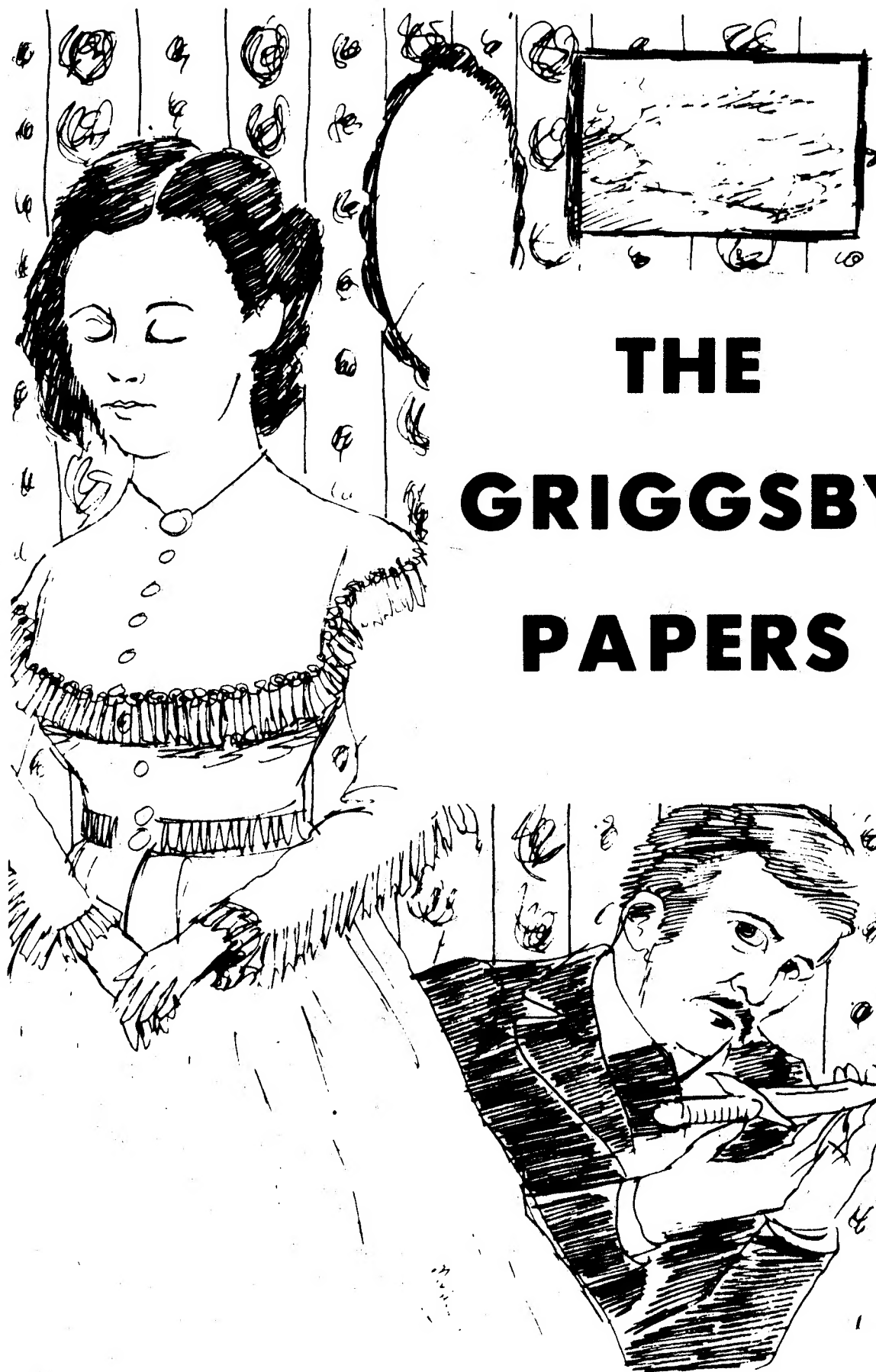
TWO NEW THRILLERS

- THE GRIGGSBY PAPERS
JACK RITCHIE 54
- THE DROP
GEORGE C. CHESBRO 80

FIVE NEW SHORT STORIES

- FIFTY BUCKS BY MONDAY
STEPHEN DENTINGER 42
- LEO MARGULIES
Publisher TIGER TALE
GARY BRANDNER 101
- CYLVIA KLEINMAN
Editorial Director THE CAUTIOUS KILLER
KURT E. JOHNSON 106
- HOLMES TAYLOR
Associate Editor THE DEADLY FARE
CLAYTON MATTHEWS 112
- THE KIDNAPPING KIT
GARY PAULSEN 124

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THE GRIGGSBY PAPERS

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Out of the dusty past the unbelievable story unfolded before my eyes. I had solved a murder that had baffled the world—fifty years too late for Justice!

by JACK RITCHIE



I, SERGEANT HENRY H. BUCKLE, Homicide, signed in at my usual time and then marched resolutely down the long corridor to the records division.

When I entered that department, twelve civilian clerks looked up. Some of them suppressed their grins, others did not.

I ignored them all and continued through the large room to a door at the farther end.

I selected a key from my ring and tried it on the lock. It was the wrong key, of course. The first one usually is.

I heard a snicker from the room behind me. I turned and glared.

No one dared to meet my eye.

I tried another key and this time unlocked the door. I switched on the inside light and walked down the dim narrow corridor to the next door. I unlocked that one too and this time descended some steps and made my way through a maze of boxes, spider webs, and assorted beams and framings until I reached the last door.

I unlocked it and turned on the lights.

As usual, I saw a medium-sized

room filled with a variety of dusty filing cabinets and discarded office furniture.

This room was my new assignment, my job, my Siberia.

It had all come about when I made the tactical error of arresting the mayor's son for drunken driving. I am not in the traffic bureau, but his car had been swaying and weaving on the road before me, and a policeman should not close his eyes to something like that, no matter what his department.

When the administrative smoke cleared, I found myself assigned to this room in the bowels of police headquarters. My job, according to hard-breathing Chief Milliken, was to review old records of murders, all of them at least twenty-five years old and unsolved.

I could take my time, he grimly assured me, no rush at all. I had the suspicion that he meant I could look forward to at least a year down here, that being the length of time the mayor's son had had his license suspended.

I hung my hat on a slightly askew hatrack and faced the filing cabinets. What would it be today? I wandered down the dusty aisles until I reached a brown wooden cabinet. It looked quite old.

I opened one of the drawers and selected one of the marbled cardboard containers at random. I took it to the desk I'd salvaged from the discarded furniture and sat down carefully on a rather undependable

swivel chair. I studied the faded handwriting on the identification tag of the container.

It read simply *Dr. Samuel Nicholson. 1862.*

I removed a thick sheaf of handwritten papers. It was written before the days of official forms and the typewriter, and that almost turned me off immediately.

The papers had yellowed and most of them were stiff and fragile, or splintered here and there. The ink had faded to a rusty red.

I began reading.

The murder of Dr. Samuel Nicholson had occurred in the home of one Julius Darby early in the morning of May 17, 1863, or very late on the previous night.

His body had been found on the floor of the drawing room at seven in the morning by one of the maids, a Kate O'Reilly.

The three-story Darby house was quite a large structure, especially for those times and this part of the country, when a twelve-by-ten-foot log cabin or a one-room frame shack was still more often than not the common man's castle.

In 1863 our city was hardly more than a village of some 1,500 inhabitants, with the Darby house situated two miles from its outskirts and more than a quarter of a mile from its nearest neighbor.

At the time of the murder the household, excluding the servants, had consisted of Julius Darby, his wife, Melanie, their two children,

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Emma, age twenty-four, and Captain Oswald Darby, age twenty-two, and of course, Dr. Nicholson, their house guest.

Kate O'Reilly's screams had awakened the household and Julius Darby had immediately sent one of his stable hands to the village for what was then the law, Sheriff Artemus Griggsby.

Artemus Griggsby?

Could that have been the same Artemus Griggsby who founded our city's public library system and remained its chief librarian for sixty-two years, dying quietly at the age of ninety-two while reading *The Mill on the Floss*?

Almost all of the sheets of paper before me were in Griggsby's handwriting.

I read his words and put myself in his shoes.

Dr. Kearney, our coroner, and I (wrote Griggsby) arrived at Darby's residence at approximately nine in the morning and were met at the large front doors by Julius Darby himself.

He led us immediately to the drawing room where lay the body of Dr. Nicholson.

I would have been content to view the corpse from a distance, but Julius Darby was at my elbow and so I approached much closer than I preferred.

Dr. Nicholson appeared to have been in his early fifties. He seemed to have been stabbed a number of times.



The murder process had been quite gory, both for the victim and the room, and very likely for the murderer. Dr. Nicholson lay fully clothed, but wearing a dressing gown. The weapon used to kill him, a thick-bladed Bowie knife, lay beside the body where the murderer had evidently dropped it.

Dr. Kearney knelt beside the body and began his careful examination.

I waited a few moments and then asked, "How long has he been dead?"

Dr. Kearney shrugged. "Probably since midnight, give or take. He's had his spell of *rigor mortis*."

I turned to Darby. "When was Dr. Nicholson last seen alive?" I asked.

"Last night, when we all retired at about ten o'clock."

Julius Darby is a burly man of commanding presence and the owner of considerable real estate in the village, not to mention thousands

of acres of timberland in the counties surrounding. He also owns the town's brewery and its distillery.

"Evidently Nicholson heard a prowler some time after he retired to his room," Darby said. "He came down to investigate and the prowler seized the knife from its display space on the wall and stabbed poor Nicholson to death." Darby indicated an open French window. "He must have fled out that way."

I stepped outside. The veranda was tiled and beyond it lay grass, both of which eliminated the possibility of finding footprints.

I returned to the room and approached the knife. It had been thoroughly gouted with blood, which now appeared to have dried on the blade and its handle.

"Is there anything missing?" I asked.

"Not as far as I can tell," Darby said. "Nicholson must have gotten to the prowler before he could pack anything away."

I took off my glasses and wiped them. "I'll need something—a small box, perhaps—for the knife. Evidence, you know."

"Of course," Darby said. He pulled the bell rope and a uniformed maid appeared.

"Kate," he said, "would you get Sheriff Griggsby a box big enough to contain the knife?"

Her eyes went to the Bowie knife on the floor and she shuddered. "Yes, sir."

"Just one moment," I said. "Are

you the person who discovered the body?"

She had black hair and light eyes which regarded me warily. "Yes, sir. 'Tis me job to open the drapes in the rooms downstairs every mornin'."

"And you screamed when you found the body?"

She regarded me with a trace of scorn.

"Now what else would I be doin' when I discover a body?"

She left the room and when she returned she handed me a wooden box approximately twelve inches long and four inches square at the ends.

I knelt down beside the murder weapon and gingerly put it in the box. Yes, the blood was quite dry. I slid the cover shut and stood up. "How long has Dr. Nicholson been your house guest?"

Darby rubbed his jaw. "He came here in April of 1862."

I'm afraid I blinked. "He's been your house guest for more than a year?"

"Well, not continuously. There was that period from about the middle of August until November when Nicholson joined the Union army. He and my son Oswald were in the same regiment, you know. Left the same day and came back together the same day."

"The regiment returned?"

"No. Just Dr. Nicholson and Oswald. Oswald was wounded at An-

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"You and Dr. Nicholson have been friends for a long time?"

"Actually I never saw him before he showed up on that day in April of '62. Relative of my wife's, though. Cousin a few times removed, I believe."

"Mr. Darby," I said, "I'm afraid that I will have to search the house."

He frowned. "What on earth for?"

"It seems evident that whoever killed Dr. Nicholson must have gotten himself and his clothes quite bloody in the process."

Darby blinked. "Now see here, you don't suspect that someone in this house killed Nicholson?" He pointed out the open French door again. "It was a prowler."

"Very likely," I said. "However, it is normal procedure to search the environs of a murder thoroughly."

He rubbed his neck. "Well, if it's normal procedure, I suppose I can't stand in the way."

I enlisted the aid of Dr. Kearney in searching the house. Frankly, I expected to find nothing. Two men alone attempting such a project in a house the size of Darby's was rather futile to begin with. But it had to be done, for form, if nothing else.

After a half an hour, we paused to rest.

"Kearney," I said, "you and Dr. Nicholson being of the same profession, what do you know about him?"

"Practically nothing. He never opened an office here. Never even met him personally, but—" He paused.

"But what?"

"I hear he had quite an eye for the ladies."

My attention was caught by a daguerreotype on the fireplace mantle. It pictured a mustachioed, but still obviously young man in the uniform of a cavalry officer. "Is that Captain Oswald Darby?"

Kearney nodded. He pulled a cigar from his pocket and bit off the end. "Ever hear of Enos Stucker?"

"No."

"One of my patients now. Formerly a trooper in Captain Oswald Darby's regiment. Stucker lost a leg at Antietam. He can't seem to remember seeing the good captain anywhere around while the bullets were flying."

"A battlefield is a large and disordered place."

"So I hear. But I just thought I'd mention it."

Dr. Kearney and I finished our search without discovering anything which might relate to the murder of Dr. Nicholson.

I then determined to interview other members of the family singly.

I found Captain Oswald Darby in the library, gazing in a melancholy fashion out of the window.

He was somewhat slight of frame and delicately featured. He wore a civilian suit, but an army greatcoat

was draped about his shoulders. A cavalrymans plumed hat lay on a nearby table.

He turned, leaning slightly on a cane.

"You are no longer in the army?" I asked.

He sighed. "Not any more. Invalided out, you know. Antietam."

I indicated the cane. "You were wounded in the leg?"

He shook his head. "No." He indicated the region of a kidney. "Right about here."

"I noticed the cane."

"The wound hasn't healed properly yet and it sort of pulls on my leg. I need the cane."

I turned our conversation to the murder. "You heard nothing during the night? The noise of a prowler, for instance?"

"No. I slept quite soundly. Went to bed at about ten when all the others did. And then I was wakened in the morning by that dreadful scream."

"You rushed downstairs and found Dr. Nicholson dead?"

He cleared his throat. "Well, everyone else seemed to be rushing about, so I thought it would be more intelligent for me to remain in my room instead of adding to the confusion."

"Have you seen Dr. Nicholson's body?"

He gazed into the distance. "No. I prefer to remember him as he was."

"Do you know if Dr. Nicholson had any enemies?"

He raised an eyebrow. "Enemies? Of course not. He was a friend to all. A gentleman, a scholar, a soldier."

I questioned Oswald further and discovered that it too was his opinion that the murderer was a prowler.

I requested that, for the record, he write a statement regarding his whereabouts on the night of the murder and give it to me before I left the Darby house.

When I left the library, I found the maid, Kate O'Reilly, polishing furniture in one of the side rooms.

"Where could I find Mrs. Darby?"

She shrugged. "In the music room, perhaps." She seemed about to leave the room.

"Just one moment, miss."

"What is it you want?"

"Just a few questions."

"If it's about any of the family, I will not answer."

"You are close to the family?"

"Not particularly. But as long as they pay me wages, I'll not say anything against them."

"Do you regard Dr. Nicholson as a member of the family?"

She hesitated. "I suppose not."

"Did Dr. Nicholson have any enemies?"

She studied me coldly. "You're an unlikely man to be sheriff."

I flushed slightly. "Madam, I was elected by the townspeople."

"Aye," she said. "That I know.

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And do you remember Timothy McSweeney?"

"Timothy McSweeney? Of course. He was my opponent."

She smiled briefly. "And me uncle, he is."

Ah, yes. Now I could understand her antagonism.

When I arrived in this part of the country six months ago, penniless, I quickly discovered that there was no great demand for literacy in the village.

I was somewhat desperate for a situation and so when I discovered that the late sheriff had been buried as the result of acute alcoholism and left his position vacant in hardly any time I quickly nominated myself for the job.

Mine would have been the only name on the ballot except that at the last moment one Timothy Mc-

Sweeney, bartender, entered the race.

I won handily, however, possibly because I made no speeches, but more probably because two-thirds of the population consisted of transplanted New Englanders and Germans, who considered the other third, the Irish, as hopeless newcomers.

"Miss O'Reilly," I said, "I'm asking everyone in the house, including the servants, to write a statement concerning his or her whereabouts last night."

Kate O'Reilly's eyes narrowed as she stared at me.

"It is just procedure," I said defensively. A sudden awkward thought occurred to me. Could she read and write? "Or perhaps I could write it for you later and you could affix your mark?"

She flushed slightly and gathered her polishing materials. "I'll show you to the music room."

When I entered that room, I found Mrs. Melanie Darby half-reclining on a couch. Her features were a delicate cameo and her figure quite small. She could hardly have been five feet tall. Beside her, on a small round table, I saw smelling salts.

She smiled wanly. "Sheriff Griggsby, I suppose you have questions to ask me?"

She appeared to have a slight southern accent. I quickly corrected that. A *border* accent.

I found myself bowing slightly.

"Did you hear anything at all unusual last night, Mrs. Darby?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid not, sheriff."

"You are a heavy sleeper?"

"No, quite the contrary. Therefore I usually find it necessary to take sleeping powders, as I did last night. I slept soundly."

"And you were wakened by the screams?"

"Yes."

I felt the next question might be a little indelicate, but I thought it necessary to ask. "You and your husband share the same bedroom, of course?"

She hesitated for a moment. "No. I'm a very restless sleeper and I feel that it's only fair to Julius that I do not disturb his rest. We have adjoining bedrooms."

"I understand that Dr. Nicholson was a relative of yours?"

"Yes. My second cousin, twice removed."

"You are not from this region?"

She smiled faintly. "Hardly anyone is. I was born and reared in Nashville, Tennessee." She studied me. "But why are all these questions necessary? Surely it must be obvious that an intruder broke into the house during the night. Dr. Nicholson heard him and went downstairs to investigate. Unfortunately the intruder killed him."

I nodded. "I'm just wondering why only Dr. Nicholson heard the intruder. His bedroom is on the second floor at the rear of the house,

isn't it? Quite the farthest of all from the drawing room?"

Her fingers touched the smelling salts. "He might have come down for some other reason. Restlessness, perhaps." She looked up. "I suppose you would like to talk to my daughter Emma too?"

"If I may?"

Mrs. Darby left the room and a few minutes later Emma Darby appeared alone.

"Yes, Sheriff Griggsby?"

I understood that she was twenty-four, yet she seemed several years older than that. She was somewhat above average height for a woman and of somewhat stalwart build. Her dark hair was severely combed and she had light gray eyes.

I suppose most people would have described her as plain, and yet I thought she was not totally unattractive.

I came to the point. "This morning you were wakened by the screams?"

"No. I was already awake. When I heard Kate scream, I came directly downstairs. As a matter of fact, I was the first person to reach her."

"And you found Dr. Nicholson dead?"

"I assumed that he was dead. At least it appeared that way to me."

"Did you touch him or disturb anything?"

"I touched nothing."

"One of the French windows leading to the rear grounds was open?"

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"Are those doors latched from the inside at night?"

"Yes. Unless last night someone forgot. Or perhaps the intruder entered the house from some other way and left by way of the French window."

"So you too think it was the work of an intruder?"

"Of course. How could it have been anyone else?"

"I presume everyone liked Dr. Nicholson?"

"Certainly. As far as I know, he had no enemies."

It seemed to me that though physically Emma resembled her father, there was something in her eyes which clearly suggested her mother, but I could not quite put my finger on it.

When I finished my questioning, I tried a moment of small talk. I indicated the two large musical instruments in the room. "Do you play the piano? Or the harp?"

"No," Emma said. "None of us is musically inclined, but every large house needs a music room, don't you think?"

She smiled rather nicely.

I finished reading the last of Sheriff Griggsby's sheets and then sat back.

Yes, here it was. Everything Griggsby had been able to assemble on the death of Dr. Nicholson—his observations and the statements from the occupants of the Darby

house and grounds. I noticed that Kate O'Reilly was not the only servant who did not know how to read and write. Of the fourteen in Darby's employ, only the chief groom and the cook were literate.

And what had been the net result of all of this?

It was the verdict of the coroner's jury that Dr. Samuel Nicholson had met his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown.

And Sheriff Griggsby had concurred.

I pondered about that knife. Do you suppose it might be in the police museum?

For that matter, did we have a police museum?

I glanced at my watch. Just about lunch time anyway. I left the papers on my desk and wended my way back to the records division.

I borrowed the use of a phone and asked the switchboard operator to connect me with the police museum.

I thought I heard her asking someone if we had such a place and then she made the connection.

I listened to at least a dozen buzzes, but no one picked up the phone.

I got the operator again and had her connect me with the personnel bureau.

The chief clerk, Louis Rupert, answered.

"This is Sergeant Henry H. Buckle," I said. "Who has charge of the police museum?"

"Just a second, Henry. I'll have to look it up."

After a while, he got back on the line. "Nobody. It's closed up."

I frowned. "I'd like to get inside for a while. Who has the key?"

"I guess I have. It must be around here somewhere."

"I'll be right over."

When I walked into the personnel bureau only Rupert, who is a civilian, appeared to be about. Apparently everyone else had gone out to lunch.

He grinned. "How are things in the center of the earth, Henry?"

"Did you find the key?"

He handed me a small wooden identification paddle to which was attached a ring of keys. "One of these should take care of it. There used to be a full-time custodian for the museum, but his job got eliminated in a budget cut and he never did get put back on. We open it up only on demand now and come to think about it, the last time that happened was two years ago when some visiting Japanese detectives wanted to go through. Looking for anything in particular?"

"Police business," I said firmly. "By the way, where is the police museum?"

"On the fourth floor. It's in a small corridor at the end of the east wing. The number's on the paddle."

I took the elevator to the fourth floor and finally found an opaque door with the lettering *police museum* on it.

I unlocked the door and stepped inside.

The room was quite chilly, the heat evidently having been turned off.

I wandered slowly through the aisles of display cases. Here was exhibited the paraphernalia of crime, which seemed to consist principally of weapons—rifles, shotguns, handguns, various cutlery, bludgeons, ropes, and what have you.

The displays seemed to be arranged in order of date and so I made my way to the earliest exhibit.

It was a saw-toothed bread knife used to cut the throat of one Alonzo Burke in 1871.

1871? That was the year the police department was organized, wasn't it? Prior to that the sheriff had been the law.

But I wanted 1863.

I noticed that the last display case had several wide drawers just below waist level.

I pulled at the double handles, but the drawers were locked. I tried the keys Rupert had given me and one of the smaller ones fitted and turned the lock.

I pulled open the top drawer. It was approximately four feet wide and deep, filled with a potpourri of bundles, boxes, and the like, all of which looked and smelled strongly of age.

I recognized Griggsby's handwriting on the labels of a number of them. Evidently when the museum had been formed, all items pre-dat-

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ing the police department had been consigned to these drawers.

I singled out a box approximately a foot long and four inches square at the end. A faded yellow card had been glued to the top of it and once again I identified Sheriff Griggsby's handwriting. The words were economical. *Dr. Samuel Nicholson. May 17, 1863.*

I pulled open the box and, yes, there it was—the Bowie knife that had evidently killed Dr. Nicholson.

The blade was quite wide, with a large handle and—

I stared.

What was this?

I brought the box to better light at one of the windows.

Amazing.

There they were, an almost perfect set of fingerprints on the handle of the knife. Evidently the blood in which they had been made had dried and in effect preserved them.

So here we had a nearly perfect set of the murderer's fingerprints. If Nicholson's murder had occurred in modern times, it would have been a simple enough process to uncover the identity of his murderer, but in those days . . .

Could they possibly be Sheriff Griggsby's prints, made when he picked up the knife? No. He had mentioned that the blood was already dry when he touched the murder weapon.

I found myself rubbing my jaw.

When I left and locked the police museum, I took the box and the

knife it contained with me. I went downstairs to Homicide and checked out one of the fingerprint kits.

I had had some experience with fingerprints in my initial police training and I thought I could still at least determine whether two prints were identical if they were placed side by side.

Back in the bowels of the building, seated before the Dr. Nicholson case papers, I went to work very carefully.

Natural latent prints made in 1863 would long ago have disappeared, of course. What I was looking for were the prints made by ink-stained fingers, visible, or almost visible, to the eye.

On the very first page I treated, I found a surprisingly good thumb print. I compared it to the thumb print on the murder weapon. They did not match.

I stared at the print on the sheet of paper again and then frowned. Too perfect. Almost fresh.

I inked my thumb and made a print next to it.

They matched.

I flushed slightly. My own print. Probably there'd be one or more on every sheet I'd handled. I'd have to watch that.

I made a complete set of my own prints on a piece of paper for future comparison and then went back to work. I discovered and eliminated seven of my own prints before I came to a strange print faintly inked

on a page in Sheriff Griggsby's handwriting.

I compared it to the ones on the knife.

They did not match.

Well, I thought, that definitely eliminates the sheriff.

When I had read the Nicholson file for the first time, I had gained the impression that it held a multitude of inky fingerprints.

A closer examination now proved disappointing. There were numerous smudges, but fingerprints were rare. The edge of the hand was a popular item, with the palm coming next. I even discovered what I believed to be an elbow print.

When I finished going through the stack of papers, I sighed.

I had a full complement of what were almost certainly Griggsby's prints—he was a literate, though messy, writer—but I had uncovered none other.

The only pages not in Griggsby's handwriting were the simple statements of Julius Darby, his wife, their two children, the chief groom, and the head cook, and they did not yield a single fingerprint.

My eye fell to the statement written by Captain Oswald Darby. He stated that he had gone to be at approximately ten o'clock on the night of the murder and that he slept soundly until he was wakened by the scream of the maid discovering the body. He did not mention that the scream did not draw him out of his room.

He stated further that he knew of no one who bore Dr. Nicholson the slightest ill feeling. It was his opinion that Dr. Nicholson had heard the intruder during the night, had gone downstairs to investigate, and in so doing had encountered the prowler, who stabbed him to death.

I examined the writing under a magnifying glass. Quite a distinctive penmanship, the words slanting sharply to the left. Yes, Captain Darby was left-handed. You could see that his palm moved over the words he'd just written and slightly fuzzed most of them.

I blinked.

But the fingerprints on the murder weapon were those of the right hand.

That eliminated Captain Oswald Darby as a murder suspect.

Unless, for some reason, he switched hands and—

I shook my head firmly. No. There lies madness. For the time being, at least, Captain Oswald Darby was out of the picture.

A thought came to me. Suppose Dr. Nicholson's murderer really was a prowler? Some stranger, long dead and buried who knows where?

The thought was somehow depressing.

I glanced at my watch. Way past lunch time.

I left the Nicholson papers where they were, but I stuffed the murder weapon and its box into my topcoat pocket. It was unlikely that anyone would come down here, but if he

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did, I didn't want him handling the knife.

I stopped in the records division on the way out and asked one of the clerks for the state's latest Blue Book.

Our state's Blue Book is published—and largely unread—yearly and contains innumerable statistics and other data relating to the state's industry, agriculture, history, geography, and other allied subjects.

I was rather curious as to whether the Darby name might appear in some footnote of history. After all, Julius Darby appeared to have been an important man — economically, at least—in his time.

I turned to the index and found three Darby references.

I turned to page seventy-eight and was astonished to discover that Captain Oswald Darby had been the governor of our state from 1884 to 1886. His brief biography indicated that the captain—the Hero of Antietam—had been elected as a Republican and served one term.

I further learned, on page 128, that his son, Major George Darby—the Hero of San Juan Hill—had also served as a one-term governor from 1910 to 1912.

I felt a bit guilty, not having known that, but consoled my intellect with the fact that probably ninety-nine out of a hundred citizens of our state didn't either.

I turned to the third reference, page 171, and acquired the additional information that the Julius



Darby House & Museum was one of our state's historical homes.

I copied down its address and then went to the police garage to claim my car.

After driving half a mile, I again remembered that I'd eaten nothing since breakfast. I parked and walked down the street until I found a small restaurant. I took a seat in one of the booths.

A waitress appeared. She was a small woman, possibly not even five feet tall. I stared at her hands, poised with pad and pencil.

But of course.

How was it Griggsby had described Mrs. Melnaie Darby? "... her figure quite small. She could hardly have been five feet tall."

And small people have small hands, don't they? Just as this waitress did?

I pulled the box out of my topcoat and slid back the cover. I examined the fingerprints on the hilt again.

Yes, they were definitely *not* made by a small hand. I would have call-

ed it at least medium. And perhaps, for its time, it might even have been classified as large. After all, people were smaller in those days and so what might pass for a medium hand today might have been regarded as a large hand yesterday.

But whatever the classification, medium or large, it definitely was not made by a small hand.

And Mrs. Melanie Darby, being a small woman, would have a small hand and so therefore did not murder Dr. Nicholson.

I rubbed my neck. But on the other hand, was it possible for a small person to have medium or even large hands?

I became aware that the waitress had disappeared and that a very young policeman stood in her place.

"What are you figuring to do with that knife, mister?"

Where had he come from? Probably he'd been having a snack at the counter.

He smiled tightly. "Did you have any ideas of holding up this place?"

I blinked. "With a knife?"

He nodded with surer knowledge. "It's been done."

I thought it proper to identify myself and reached for my wallet.

His hand had been on the butt of his service revolver and now I suddenly stared into the muzzle of a Police .38.

"Don't move," he ordered, his voice breaking slightly.

I smiled reassuringly. "It's quite

all right, officer. I am also a member—"

"Shut up and stand up," he ordered. "And put the palms of your hands against that wall."

I saw that the safety of his pistol was off and his trigger finger appeared faintly white.

I rose. Why did these things always happen to me? I put my palms against the wall and spread my feet approximately a yard from its base.

"It is my duty to inform you of your rights," he said. "You have the right to remain silent. If you choose not to remain silent—"

My temper was a bit frayed. "First you search me. If you find any reason to formally arrest me, then you inform me of my rights."

"Shut up." He searched me and found my service revolver. "Ah, ha. What have we here?"

"If you'll look in my wallet—"

"Trying to bribe me?"

"No, you idiot. Look at my identification."

"Hand me your wallet."

"How can I do that when I'm leaning against the wall like this?"

"Well, stand up straight."

"I suppose you want me to take the money out of my wallet first?"

He nodded. "I was coming to that."

I removed my folding money and handed the wallet to him.

There was some silence as he digested the information and the presence of a badge in my wallet.

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"Sergeant Henry H. Buckle? *The* Sergeant Henry H. Buckle?"

Evidently he'd heard of me.

"Yes," I said emphatically.

He grinned feebly. "I guess I was a little hasty."

I realized that I was the center of all eyes in the restaurant. I dislike such situations intensely.

I retrieved my wallet and the revolver, put the knife back into the box and the box back into my top-coat pocket.

I tried to think of some stiff departing words, but there were none. I stalked out of the restaurant with as much dignity as I could muster.

I found my car and drove to the address of the Julius Darby House Museum.

When it had been built, the Darby House Museum.

When it had been built, the Darby house had been a quarter of a mile from the nearest other habitation, but now the area was a quiet residential section in the older part of the city.

I found a parking spot for my car and walked up to the large front door. I found a sign to one side indicating that the Darby House Museum was open on weekdays from two until five in the afternoon from April until the end of October.

I found the door locked.

I tried the brass knocker and waited patiently. Then I used the knocker again.

Finally I heard a bolt being drawn

and the door opened slightly. A slight gray-haired woman in her sixties peered out. "Yes?"

"Isn't the museum open today?"

She seemed a little startled by the question. "What group are you with?"

Automatically I looked back over my shoulder, but I was alone. "I'm not with any group."

She frowned. "You mean you came here alone? Just off the street?"

"Well . . . yes."

She regarded me condescendingly. "People come here in groups, you know. Groups of students or groups from women's clubs. We have quite a few of those. They make appointments beforehand and I guide them through the house. Nobody comes here alone just off the street."

I pointed out to her that the sign at the front door mentioned nothing at all about groups and I had no intention of joining one just to get permission to tour the house.

She remained reluctant. "But I've never had anybody come in just off the street."

"Madam," I said firmly. "Will I be allowed to tour this house or do I write a scathing letter to the *Journal*?"

The possibility of publicity shook her. "Very well. You may enter, but it is against all tradition."

I stepped into the hallway.

To my right open double doors revealed a large high-ceilinged room,

one corner of which was devoted to a desk, a typewriter, and a filing cabinet. A name plate on the desk indicated that a H. E. Griggsby was the curator.

"Is Mr. Griggsby in?" I asked.

She smiled briefly. "I am H. E. Griggsby."

I followed as she led the way through a set of doors on the other side of the hall.

"This is the drawing room," she said.

It had obviously been restored to its original condition and period. The dark and heavy furniture gleamed with wax. There was a huge marble fireplace at one end of the room.

My eyes went to the polished floor. So this was where the murder had occurred.

I knelt down and examined a portion of the floor. No stains, but then, of course, one could not expect any after more than a hundred years.

Miss Griggsby watched me, a bit wide-eyed.

I got to my feet and dusted the knees of my trousers. "This is where the murder occurred. Right in this room."

She stared. "Murder? What murder?"

"The murder of Dr. Nicholson on May 17, 1863."

She did not appear to be convinced. "Well, I don't know anything about that. It isn't in my talk."

There were two oil portraits above the fireplace mantel. The copper plates beneath identified them as

Julius Darby (1808-79) and Melanie Darby (1819-1902).

Julius Darby had a commanding eye and a determined jaw. He was the stuff of which our pioneer ancestors were made—the successful ones, at least.

And Melanie Darby. Yes, delicate, aristocratic features. A cameo.

I noticed that display cases here and there against the walls contained photographs and various other family memorabilia.

I singled out a daguerreotype. The card beneath identified the group as that of Julius Darby, his wife Melanie, daughter Emma, and son Captain Oswald Darby—the Hero of Antietam.

Captain Oswald Darby wore his hair long and, of course, he had those silky mustachios. Two buttons of his uniform were undone in the casual, relaxed, and absolutely obligatory fashion of the day. On his head swaggered a cavalry officer's plumed hat. He was further equipped with spurred high boots and a sheathed saber, the end of which appeared to drag on the ground.

Emma Darby was not quite heavy, but definitely solid, and taller than her brother. A stern expression characterized her pose and her straight hair was parted exactly down the middle.

Julius and Melanie sat on chairs, their children standing.

I studied Melanie's hands. Yes, very small. Actually tiny.

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My eyes went to Julius Darby's hands, especially the right one.

The ring finger was missing.

I read the card beneath again. The daguerreotype had been taken in August of 1962, fully eight or nine months before the murder.

Evidently some time in his life, and certainly before the death of Dr. Nicholson, Julius Darby had lost the ring finger of his right hand.

However, the fingerprints on the Bowie knife clearly indicated that the murderer possessed all of the fingers of his right hand.

I turned and somewhat startled Miss Griggsby in the process.

"And now, if you will," I said,

"you may conduct me through the rest of the house."

As she guided me through the rooms, she delivered her tour talk—somewhat nervously, I thought. She covered considerable of the Darby family history, including that of the two governors.

Half an hour later, we were on the third floor.

I interrupted her. "Are you by any chance related to Artemus Griggsby, the father of our public library system?"

She seemed surprised that I would know. "Why, yes. He was one of my great-grandfathers. I had four, you know. The histories of the Darbys and the Griggsbys have touched during the years. I think the fact that I'm a Griggsby had more than a little to do with my being made curator." She smiled briefly. "The Darby Foundation is thinking of creating a Griggsby room here. We have quite a collection of great-grandfather's papers, correspondence, journals, and so forth."

"You have Artemus Griggsby's journals?"

She nodded. "He kept a daily record of his life, starting at the age of twelve."

"I must see them."

She was distinctly uneasy. "It isn't a part of the tour. And besides, they're in boxes and crates in the storage room."

"Where is the storage room?"

I'm afraid I sounded a bit imperious.

She swallowed with difficulty and then led the way, looking back over her shoulder now and then, until we reached a door at the end of the hallway. She produced a ring of keys, selected one, and unlocked the door.

The storage room, a semi-attic, was filled with boxes, cartons, and miscellaneous other bits.

"That stack over by the window," she said. "But everything's very dusty."

She remained in the doorway. "I'm expecting a group momentarily."

I nodded. "By all means go down and prepare to receive them. I have no idea how long I will be up here."

When she was gone, I began opening the Griggsby cases, of which there appeared to be at least two dozen.

In the third box I found the collection of Griggsby journals, each year apparently making up a separate volume.

I dug down to the journal dated 1863.

Would Artemus Griggsby have anything to confide to his journal which he would not put in an official report?

I would soon find out.

I turned to the pages of May 17.

I learned nothing new from the first half of the entry—a quite long one. But then . . .

I went back upstairs (Artemus

Griggsby wrote) to Dr. Nicholson's room.

I did not know exactly what I was looking for, or whether there was anything to find, but I thought I really should make the effort to find out more about the murder victim.

Once again I paged through the two packed wardrobes, discovering nothing new to draw my interest. I noted once more the half-empty whiskey bottle and the dusty medical bag beside the shoes.

This time I opened the bag and rummaged through its contents.

What was that at the bottom? An envelope?

It was, and since it was not sealed, I had no qualms in removing its contents.

I found a marriage certificate—or more properly, as attested to in one corner, a copy of a marriage certificate — issued in Nashville, Tennessee, on January 7, 1835, testifying to the union of one Melanie Truitt and a Samuel Meechum.

Melanie Truitt? Samuel Meechum?

I went back downstairs and found the maid Kate.

"Ah," she said. "About to make an arrest?"

"Could you please tell Mrs. Darby that I would like to see her?"

"Why?"

"None of your damn business. I'll wait in the drawing room."

Mrs. Darby appeared there some ten minutes later. She paused in the

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doorway and then came carefully toward me. "Can I help you, sheriff?"

Since I had seen her last she had acquired a faint aura of liquor.

"Mrs. Darby," I said, "what was your maiden name?"

She frowned slightly. "Truitt. Why?"

I handed her the marriage certificate copy.

She stared at the paper for a moment, then reached into the pocket of her dress and produced a pair of silver-rimmed reading glasses.

I was faintly shaken. Somehow one does not expect a woman such as Mrs. Darby to need reading glasses. They made her look ten years older.

She read the paper and then returned the glasses to her pocket. "Mr. Meechum was my first husband. I married him when I was sixteen. He died two years later. Where did you find this—this paper?"

"Concealed among Dr. Nicholson's things. Why would he keep a copy of your first marriage certificate?"

"I have no idea."

"Mrs. Darby," I said, "I notice that your first husband's given name was Samuel."

"Yes?"

"And Dr. Nicholson's first name is—was also Samuel."

"It is a coincidence, nothing more."

"How did your first husband die?"

"A fever."

"He died in Nashville?"

"Yes."

"That would be about 1837?"

"I suppose so."

"I'll have to write to the proper authorities there to verify that."

She frowned. Isn't my word enough? Why must you pursue this further?"

"I'm afraid it is my duty, Mrs. Darby. To explore all the facts."

"But what does my first husband's death have to do with Dr. Nicholson's murder?"

"Possibly nothing. However, I must investigate."

There was a silence as she studied me. "Does anyone besides you know about this marriage certificate?"

"No."

She went to the bell rope and pulled it.

After a moment the maid appeared.

"Kate," Mrs. Darby said "bring down the tray beside my bed. And an extra glass."

Mrs. Darby and I remained silent until Kate O'Reilly re-appeared with a silver tray which held a half-empty bottle of brandy, a glass pitcher of what appeared to be water, a sugar bowl, a spoon and two glasses. She put them on a table, glared at me, and left.

Mrs. Darby indicated that I do the honors. "Two fingers of brandy," she said. "A little branch water, and a spoon of sugar."

I prepared the drink as directed and brought it to her.

She waited until I poured myself half an inch of brandy.

"Ordinarily I don't touch liquor more than once or twice a year," she said. "But I think Sam's death needs some sort of commemoration."

She sipped from her glass. "Yes, Sam Nicholson and I were married in Nashville in the year of our Lord 1835. Only his name was Meechum then. I had a stake of \$2500 in gold left to me by my father." She smiled faintly. "He was a saloon keeper, but the real business was in the rooms upstairs."

She sighed. "Sam and I had a good time on that \$2500. I'll admit to that. But the day after we spent the last dollar, Sam disappeared. Three weeks later, I heard that he'd been killed in a gambling argument on a river boat."

"But Meechum wasn't dead?"

"Obviously not. He showed up here about a year ago."

"How did he find you?"

"It wasn't a question of finding. I had nothing to hide. Sam was dead, as far as I knew, and that made me a *bona fide* widow. I met Julius a year later and married him. When Sam passed through Nashville last year, he discovered that I'd remarried and where I'd moved."

"Why did he come up here after all those years?"

"For money, of course."

"He blackmailed you?"

"Carefully. Sam was never one

to kill a golden goose or raise unnecessary discontent."

"And your husband paid?"

"Julius knew nothing about it. As far as he was concerned, my first husband was dead."

I wondered how it was possible for her to pay Nicholson, probably generously, without her husband being aware of it.

She finished her drink and handed me the glass. "More."

I went to the bottle. "Nicholson forced you to accept him as a house guest?"

She smiled faintly. "Sam could still be a lot of fun."

Probably a good conversationalist, I thought. I poured brandy. "Now that Meechum is really dead, I suppose that you and your husband will go somewhere and discreetly have another marriage ceremony performed?" I cleared my throat. "To—ah, legitimize the status of your children."

She took the filled glass. "Hell, no. Let sleeping dogs lie. Nobody knows about this but you and me and let's keep it that way."

I drew myself up to the responsibility. "My lips are sealed, madam. And I certainly shall not resort to blackmail."

Her voice seemed to be thickening a bit. "Not today, at least. You're an odd-looking man for a sheriff."

I colored slightly. "I consider the position temporary. I much prefer being a librarian, as I was in Brook-

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lyn, but my doctor advised me to go farther west for the sake of my health. Frankly, I haven't noticed any particular difference in the air here."

She drank half her brandy and branch water. "The village doesn't have a library?"

I nodded sadly. "Unfortunately not."

She gave that some thought. "Hell, I suppose the people around here could use a little culture. I'll pull a few strings and get the library rolling. We'll put you in charge of the books. How does that suit you?"

It suited me just fine, but I had the entirely irrational feeling that I had just blackmailed somebody. I went to the bottle, half filled my glass, and changed the subject. "Your son seems to have been rather fond of Dr. Nicholson."

"Why shouldn't he be? Sam probably saved his life."

"On the battlefield?"

She laughed lightly. "Wars aren't made for everybody. Certainly not for people like Oswald. Sensitive and delicate, you know."

I nodded. "As you are, madam."

She looked at me sharply for a second and then continued. "But the war came, the bands played, and Oswald got himself some uniforms." She sipped her drink. "I arranged things and the men of the regiment elected him captain. Might have been a major, except that the second keg of whiskey got lost on the way to the camp ground."

"Dr. Nicholson became a member of the regiment at the same time?"

"Sam was always a little restless. The regiment needed a surgeon, so he joined too."

There had been a point of doubt in my mind. "Then Nicholson really was a doctor?"

She shrugged. "Sam read some books five years ago and set himself up in business. What does a doctor need to know? How to deliver a baby, wait out a fever, and saw off a leg. That's it. Maybe a hundred years from now it will be different, but that's the way it is now."

She went to the bottle herself this time and poured, forgetting the branch water and the sugar.

"How did Nicholson save your son's life?"

She dabbed at the perspiration on her forehead with a tiny handkerchief. "Sam and Oswald were riding ahead of the regiment when the Confederate batteries opened up in the distance, and then not even in their direction. But poor Oswald had never heard anything like that before. He fainted and fell off his horse. Luckily they were in a grove of trees out of sight of the regiment when it happened. Sam pulled Oswald into an abandoned shed and let the troops pass."

"Oswald wasn't wounded at all?"

"Not unless you want to count falling off a horse. But Sam bandaged him up and down anyway and personally escorted him to a field

hospital. He arranged that nobody but he himself would touch Oswald's bandages."

She found herself a chair and sat down. "Cost me three thousand dollars to get Oswald out of the army all proper and legal. Sam took care of the details. He was always good at that. Probably pocketed half the money I sent him, but he got the job done. Oswald was discharged because of wounds received in action. Sam even got him a medal for bravery."

I realized that I should be outraged, but somehow it seemed too difficult. "Why was it necessary to go through all that trouble and expense to get your son out of the army? I believe that an officer is still entitled to resign his commission whenever he so chooses?"

She nodded slowly. "But there would always be a certain stigma attached to resigning while a war was still being fought. I have certain plans for Oswald's future and we can't afford any stigma on his war record."

"How did Nicholson get out of the army?"

"He resigned. Sam didn't give a damn about stigma."

I went back to the tray for a refill and for some reason staggered slightly. I turned into a window alcove to see if I could get a little fresh air.

I heard someone enter the room and then the voice of Julius Darby. "Melanie, Tipton's asking thirty-five

thousand for his acreage now. I think we ought to buy."

"No," Melanie said firmly.

I turned, but there was a heavy drape before my face. I realized that Julius couldn't see me and neither could I see him. I decided to keep it that way.

Julius' voice had a touch of the pleading. "But Melanie, I think it's a fair price."

"Maybe it is," Melanie said, "but I know that nobody besides us even made him an offer. He'll have to go down another five thousand before I think about it."

Julius moved to another subject. "I met a man at McGinty's blacksmith shop and he's the inventor of a cherry pitter. For only five hundred dollars I can get fifty per cent of everything he—"

"Forget it."

"But it works, Melanie. I saw it with my own eyes. We could make a fortune."

"No."

Julius sighed. "Well, I guess I'll go to the stable and check on that new black mare."

"Fine," Melanie said. "But don't get in the way of the grooms. They have been complaining about that lately."

When he was gone, I came out from behind the window drape.

Melanie Darby frowned, as though trying to remember who I was and then she did. "Why aren't you in the army?"

I drew myself up. "Madam, I vol-

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unteered several times, but the doctors rejected me."

I then said my good-bys and carefully made my way to the door.

I looked back.

There sat Melanie Darby on a highbacked chair.

A veritable cameo, I admitted. Delicate, aristocratic features. Tiny figure. Tiny hands.

And drunk.

I read entries for several days following the seventeenth, but evidently Griggsby had no more to say on the Nicholson murder.

I closed the journal and my eyes went back to the last box I'd opened. I picked up a thick marbled volume. It was *The Mill on the Floss*. A black bookmark reposed historically between pages 72 and 73.

My attention wandered to a packet of envelopes neatly tied up with a faded blue ribbon. I picked it up. The face of the top envelope bore the words, *Artemus Griggsby, Esq.*

Esquire?

The ribbon was a bit loose and I was able to riffle through the pack. Each of the envelopes appeared to have Artemus Griggsby's name on its face.

I turned the bundle over.

What was that red blob on the reverse side of the envelope? A fragment of wax?

Of course. Sealing wax.

I pulled off the ribbon. There were about thirty envelopes in the pack. Since they bore no specific

address or cancellation marks, they had evidently been delivered by hand.

Each of the envelopes appeared to have at one time been sealed. In some cases the sealing wax had disappeared entirely, leaving just the shadow of its existence. In others a few fragments still clung to the paper. However, on one of the envelopes all of the wax had survived, though cracked, of course, in the process of opening.

I fitted the pieces of the seal carefully together.

What was that on top of the seal?

A thumb print?

Yes.

In those days some people were content with just the wax seal itself. Others stamped the wax with various devices or initials, and still others affixed a thumb or fingerprint to the seal indicating a close personal interest in the intended receiver of the letter.

I am certainly not one to claim recognition of a thumb print at a glance, yet I felt a rising excitement.

I removed the Bowie knife from its box and lay it beside the seal. Using my magnifying glass, I carefully compared both prints.

They were identical.

This was it.

The killer of Dr. Nicholson had addressed these envelopes to Artemus Griggsby.

I heard a noise behind me and turned.

It was Miss Griggsby standing in the hall, somehow reluctant to enter. She appeared to glance to the right and to the left, and then slowly she stepped a foot or two into the room.

I showed her the envelope. "Do you realize what this is?"

She looked and nodded. "Oh, those. They were written by my great-grandmother before she married Artemus Griggsby."

I blinked.

She married Artemus Griggsby?

But, of course.

That explained it.

That was why Griggsby stopped short of finding the murderer. Deliberately?

There was no art of fingerprinting in those days, but surely Griggsby must have been observant enough to note the size and number of the fingerprints on the knife. And surely he must have been able to eliminate Julius Darby because of his missing finger, and Captain Oswald Darby because he was left-handed, and Mrs. Darby because her hands were too small.

And that left only Emma.

But he had been strongly attracted by her and the last thing in the world he wanted to do was . . .

Why had Emma Darby killed Dr. Nicholson?

One could only guess.

Nicholson had quite an eye for the ladies, as Dr. Griffith had put it. And he had no scruples.

He had made advances to Emma.

And she had responded. Who could blame her? A plain woman of twenty-four receiving male attention, probably for the first time in her life.

And when he had told her that he couldn't—or wouldn't—marry her, the distraught woman had seized the Bowie knife and stabbed him to death.

I studied Miss Griggsby. What would be her reaction if it were made public that her great-grandmother was a murderess?

It might be devastating. Certainly she wouldn't thank me.

And the Darby descendants? Would they be happy to know that the twelfth governor of our state was illegitimate and a fraud?

What would they do to Miss Griggsby for letting me see the Griggsby journals?

Probably they'd fire her.

I shook my head. No, it was better not to stir the ashes. Leave things as they were.

I sighed and pulled the letter out of its envelope. There was no salutation whatsoever and the sentences were uncommonly short.

*I have the red pencil box.
I will show the red pencil box
to my brother. My brother
does not have a red pencil box.*

What the devil?

"Those are the lessons," Miss Griggsby said. "He taught her how to read and write before they were married."

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I blinked. "You mean Emma Darby was illiterate?"

"Emma Darby. Why, no. She had a quite good formal education. I'm speaking of Kate O'Reilly. She was a maid in the Darby household. Artemus Griggsby married her. She was really quite intelligent. Later in life she wrote a three-volume Gothic romance."

I was stunned.

Kate O'Reilly a murderess? The Irish maid whose Uncle Timothy had run for sheriff and been struck down by prejudice?

But what could her motive possibly have been?

Well, now that I thought it over, probably the same as the one I'd attributed to Emma Darby. People like Sam Nicholson were always fooling around with the servants.

Kate had been spurned—at least insofar as the altar was concerned—and she had seized the Bowie knife and dispatched Sam Nicholson.

I looked at the seal on the envelope again and reached for the knife to compare . . .

Miss Griggsby shrieked and immediately two uniformed police officers leaped into the room, revolvers in their hands.

Where had they come from? Had

they been standing just outside? Had she telephoned for them? But why?

Miss Griggsby remained highly agitated. "He came in here just off the street and he crawled on the drawing room floor and now he tried to stab me!"

I recognized the two policemen and they recognized me.

Officer Trapp put away his revolver. "It's all right, ma'am. He's harmless."

Harmless?

I took a deep breath. "Miss Griggsby, I assure you that I did not have the slightest intention of stabbing you. I merely intended to return the knife to its proper case."

And I did just that.

"What were you doing here?" Trapp asked.

"Official police business," I said. "I am not at liberty to disclose it to every patrolman I happen to meet."

I walked stiffly past them and left the building. As I glanced back, I thought I saw them at one of the third story windows.

My ears rang slightly.

I found a parking ticket under the windshield wiper of my car.

When I got home I drank three stiff glasses of sherry.

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